

Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium

DUMBARTON OAKS SYMPOSIUM, 25–27 APRIL 2014

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Byzantine culture was notably attuned to a cosmos of multiple dominions: material, bodily, intellectual, physical, spiritual, human, divine. Despite a prevailing discourse to the contrary, the Byzantine world found its bridges between domains most often in sensory modes of awareness. These different domains were concretely perceptible and were encountered daily amid the mundane no less than the exalted. Icons, incense, music, sacred architecture, ritual activity; saints, imperial families, persons at prayer; hymnography, ascetical or mystical literature: in all of its cultural expressions, the Byzantines excelled in highlighting the intersections between human and divine realms through sensory engagement (whether positive or negative).

Byzantinists have been slow to look at the operations of the senses in Byzantium, especially those of seeing, its relation to the other senses, and phenomenological approaches in general. More recently, work

on smell and hearing has followed that on seeing, and yet the areas of taste and touch—the most universal and most necessary of the senses—are still largely uncharted. Nor has much been done to explore how Byzantines viewed the senses, or how they envisaged the sensory interactions with their world. A map of the connections between sense perceptions and other processes (of perception, memory, visualization) in the Byzantine brain has still to be sketched out. How did the Byzantines describe, narrate, or represent the senses at work? Participants were invited to consider how individual senses in Byzantium operated in the context of all the senses, and their place in Byzantine thought about perception and cognition. Recent work on dreaming, on memory, and on the emotions has made advances possible, and collaborative experiments between Byzantinists and neurological scientists open further approaches.

FRIDAY, 25 APRIL

Introduction

Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Brown University)

I: SIGHT UNSEEN

How Bodies Know, How We Know Bodies

Glenn Peers (University of Texas, Austin)

Sensing Beauty: Medieval Art, the Five Senses and the Art Museum

Martina Bagnoli (Walters Art Museum)

II: SOUNDS AND SILENCES

The Byzantine Ear: Perceptions of Sound and Sonic Environments across the Byzantine Acoustic Horizon

Amy Papalexandrou (Richard Stockton College of New Jersey)

Geographies of Silence in Late Antiquity

Kim Haines-Eitzen (Cornell University)

The Phenomenon of Embellishment and Recomposition in the Music of Late Byzantium

Spiro Antonopoulos (City University, London)

SATURDAY, 26 APRIL

III: OLFATORY LANDSCAPES

The Smells of Time: Olfactory Associations with the Past in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia
Felipe Rojas Silva (Brown University)

Finding Scents in Islamic Gardens
Dede Fairchild Ruggles (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

IV: TASTES OF LIFE

Struggling with Romanos's "Dagger of Taste"
Thomas Arentzen (Lund University)

Baking Bread and Salting Fish: the Archaeology of Monastic Kitchens and Ascetic Taste
Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom (Wittenberg University)

V: TOUCHING AND FEELING

The Saint's Two Bodies: Sensibility under (Self-)Torture in Byzantine Hagiography
Stavroula Constantinou (University of Cyprus)

To Touch or Not to Touch: Erotic Tactility in Byzantine Literature
Ingela Nilsson (Uppsala University)

SUNDAY, 27 APRIL

VI: CELEBRATING THE SENSES

Virtual Sensations and Inner Visions: Words and the Senses in Late Antiquity and Byzantium
Ruth Webb (Université Lille)

Dancing with the Angel of Death: The Adulterous Woman of Numbers 5 and the Senses
Laura Lieber (Duke University)

The Spiritual Senses, Monastic and Theological
Marcus Plested (Marquette University)

Conclusion and Scent Lab Results
Margaret Mullett (Dumbarton Oaks)
and Dede Fairchild Ruggles